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The Honourable Denis Paradis

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● (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) we are continuing our study on the Roadmap and Immigration in francophone minority communities.

Today we are pleased to welcome the Hon. Ahmed Hussen, M.P. and Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Welcome, Minister.

We also have with us today representatives from Citizenship and Immigration: David Manicom, Assistant Deputy Minister; Corinne Prince, Director General; Joel Denis, Director; and Holly Flowers Code, Chief Human Resources Officer.

[*English*]

Welcome to the official languages committee.

[*Translation*]

You have 10 minutes to make your presentation. Then, as usual, we will move on to questions and comments.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Chair.

I am pleased to appear before the committee to discuss the link between the Government of Canada's immigration measures and official languages.

[*English*]

I have some brief opening remarks, and I'll be happy to take questions after that.

As the committee members likely know, in late 2017 our government announced a plan to pursue the most ambitious immigration levels in Canadian history because we know that immigration positively contributes to both the Canadian economy and our society. We have a plan to steadily increase our immigration levels.

[*Translation*]

This plan includes efforts geared specifically at francophone immigration, which plays an important role in Canada's future.

To that end, the federal government plans to support and help francophone communities outside Quebec by contributing to francophone immigration and adopting measures in support of such immigration.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, we continue working toward achieving the target of 4.4% francophone migration by 2023.

[*Translation*]

To fulfill that commitment, IRCC has already made changes to its programs for French-speaking immigrants.

[*English*]

In 2016, IRCC adjusted the express entry system to make it easier for all temporary foreign workers and international students to become permanent residents. We expect French-speaking immigrants to benefit from these changes. In 2017, to increase the proportion of French-speaking immigrants coming to Canada through economic programs, we awarded additional points under the express entry system to immigration applicants with strong proficiency in French.

We are already seeing positive trends resulting from these changes, even though it's been a very short period of time since these changes have been implemented. The number of French speakers, therefore, invited to apply to come to Canada under the express entry system has now doubled. That is a huge achievement as a result of the change to express entry.

In 2016 we also introduced the *mobilité francophone* system, which helps employers outside of Quebec hire French-speaking workers from abroad to undertake skilled work, and in exchange for taking a chance on that worker they get a break on the labour market impact assessment. In 2017 we adjusted this stream to facilitate the recruitment of even more French-speaking temporary workers.

[*Translation*]

We also continued our promotion and recruitment efforts to sell Canada as a destination of choice for French-speaking immigrants. This includes taking part in targeted initiatives such as Destination Canada fairs, which are very effective in Europe, and other similar events in Europe and Africa.

[*English*]

On March 28 of this year, the Minister of Canadian Heritage introduced our government's overall action plan for official languages for 2018 to 2023. As part of this plan, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is committed to supporting the vitality of francophone minority communities.

I'm pleased to also highlight that budget 2018 allocated $40.8 million in new funding over five years to IRCC.

[*Translation*]

IRCC plans to consolidate what we refer to as the francophone integration pathway to official language minority communities, and to enhance collaboration and accountability within the department.

[*English*]

Our work with the francophone integration pathway will entail the following: strengthening connections between French-speaking immigrants, improving the provision of francophone settlement services, and building the capacity of the francophone settlement services sector. This initiative will help French-speaking newcomers to obtain the information they need regarding francophone communities and services from francophone settlement organizations.

To accomplish this, it will cover the entire integration spectrum, from pre-arrival all the way to citizenship.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to note that part of this francophone integration pathway includes adding more francophone service providers at some international airports in Canada. We are starting with the LB Pearson International Airport, a major point of interest for immigrants to Canada.

[*English*]

The francophone integration pathway will also work to increase the availability and accessibility of French-language training that is adapted to the needs of French-speaking immigrants. For example, it will expand online learning tools so that French-speaking newcomers can access the learning opportunities they need to achieve their unique settlement goals.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

We are also improving the availability of professional development in French for francophone settlement service providers, including for service delivery coordination networks, the Francophone immigration networks. We have 13 such networks from coast to coast, in every province and territory except for Quebec and Nunavut.

[*English*]

Another part of the francophone integration pathway announced in the federal action plan is a new initiative called "welcoming francophone communities". This will help targeted communities to improve their capacity to help French-speaking newcomers integrate and remain in these communities via enhanced services and programs. We're also aiming to increase the availability of French-language tests at a lower cost. Currently, we're working with independent language-testing organizations to provide these services to potential economic immigrants.

Finally, we plan to improve the coordination of francophone immigration services at IRCC itself, with increased horizontal policy engagement and the creation of a francophone immigration policy hub within IRCC. This hub will reinforce the capacity of the department to review and revise activities in relation to francophone immigration.

[*Translation*]

IRCC is also working with a number of partners, including the provinces, territories, and francophone communities on developing a new comprehensive francophone immigration strategy to improve the coherence of the activities meant to support French-speaking newcomers and contribute to achieving the targets set for francophone immigration outside Quebec.

These measures will also be a complement to our plan for enhancing our accountability, reporting, and performance measures, as well as our ability to evaluate the impact of the department's measures when it comes to official languages.

[*English*]

Over much of this year, I met with provincial and territorial ministers responsible for immigration. I also met with the Canadian francophonie in Toronto at the second forum on francophone immigration. This was an opportunity to discuss initiatives that encourage francophone immigrants to settle in francophone minority communities outside of Quebec in Canada and that help these immigrants to remain in these communities.

Ministers in attendance endorsed the first-ever federal-provincial-territorial action plan for increased francophone immigration outside of Quebec. This plan outlines concrete actions that our different jurisdictions can take. These include promoting awareness of francophone immigration opportunities; the provision of immigration pathways and settlement services to prospective French-speaking immigrants and applicants; increasing employer engagement in French-speaking immigrant recruitment and employment; increasing the availability, awareness, and accessibility of French-language services; and supporting diverse and inclusive francophone communities.

By pursuing these initiatives, this plan will contribute to an increase in the number of French-speaking immigrants settling in Canada outside of Quebec.

The participation rate of French-speaking immigrants in local labour markets is also set to increase. What will also increase is the participation rate of French-speaking immigrants in broader communities and social networks. I should add that, following the FPT forum, a symposium bringing together governments and community organizations was held on March 22 this year in Calgary. This event laid the foundation for potential collaboration between governments and communities to strengthen francophone immigration to Canada, including the FPT action plan.

Before closing, Mr. Chair, I should note that recently I joined the Honourable Laura Albanese, Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to sign three new annexes to the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement. One of these annexes was the French-speaking immigrant annex, which will help Canada and Ontario identify opportunities to increase the number of French-speaking immigrants coming to Canada and Ontario. I had previously signed a similar annex with my counterpart in New Brunswick.

This is just one of the ways in which the federal and provincial governments are working together to maximize the economic, social, and cultural benefits of immigration. To this end, our priority on increasing francophone immigration outside of Quebec will help address these challenges and support the vitality of our francophone communities.

Our government recognizes that the bilingual nature of Canada reinforces both our society and our economy. While we have work to do to reach this goal, we'll continue to make significant progress that supports French-speaking immigrants.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Under the new measures in the Action Plan for Official Languages, we are allocating funds directly to francophone minority communities and improving their ability to integrate and retain French-speaking immigrants.

We want every community in Canada to benefit from immigration and we want to encourage French-speaking immigrants to settle and get established in every community in our country.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We will now be pleased to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now move immediately to questions and comments.

Mr. Généreux, the floor is yours.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here today.

Minister, this afternoon in the House, not once but twice you accused the Conservatives of lacking compassion.

Contrary to what you said, compassion is not a value that can be assigned a dollar sign, in my opinion.

Do you maintain your position?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I made my comment with respect to what I felt was the record of the Conservative Party when it was in government. I felt that cutting health care to refugee claimants, a practice that the Federal Court called "cruel and unusual treatment", is something that demonstrated a lack of compassion for refugees. That is why I made those comments. They were not a personal attack in nature, but a comment on the policies of the previous Conservative government with respect to refugees.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Minister, I was part of that government from 2009 to 2011. The decisions we had to make at the time, both within the department that you currently manage and the government machinery as a whole, were not taken out of a lack of compassion, but out of necessity.

I have to say that I sincerely felt very insulted this afternoon, as did all my colleagues, when you said that we lacked compassion because we made budgetary cuts, or, more specifically, we reduced the amount of money that was allocated to certain places. I must say that this is unacceptable.

That being said, I read your eight-page plan on francophone immigration in Canada and I have questions for you on the large number of illegal immigrants crossing the border, immigrants who are primarily of Nigerian origin.

You were in Montreal this morning. I heard on the radio, just after your interview, that the vast majority of these immigrants were anglophones. In fact, roughly 95% speak English and 5% speak French.

What do you plan to do with these asylum seekers who have been illegally crossing our border for the past year? Last year, more than 20,000 people illegally crossed the border. This year, we expect that number to be even higher.

Many of these people are inevitably going to stay in Canada and will have to decide where to live. Since the majority of them speak English, this is not going to help improve the percentage of francophones who could settle in the other provinces.

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: On the issue of irregular migration, we've been seized with this issue from the very beginning. We work very closely with the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba, and any other province that's affected by this. We have an intergovernmental task force on irregular migration that meets frequently. We have a very vigorous and strong outreach program by members of Parliament, and also by our Canadian embassy in the United States, as well as our 12 consulates all over the United States. In addition to that, we have ensured as a government that each and every individual who irregularly crosses our border is apprehended, arrested, and undergoes very rigorous criminal, health, and background checks. If anybody presents a threat to Canadian society, they are immediately detained. They don't actually get to make a claim.

As for what we're doing beyond that, as I said we have been working very closely with the provinces to ensure that the federal government is responsive to their concerns with about the effects that asylum seekers would have on their provincial social services, but our priority remains working very closely with the United States on outreach, on addressing issues related to the border. That work continues to be expressed in various different ways, from outreach to interdiction, to providing the necessary resources for more border security operations, to more money for the Immigration and Refugee Board.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: This all started when the Prime Minister tweeted that everyone is welcome in Canada. According to the same broadcast I was listening to this morning, I believe that you yourself are going to Nigeria soon.

Are you able to tell us which country you will have to go to in six months to repeat the message to refugees all around the world who want to enter Canada through the United States, given that that country issues visas more easily than Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Just to be clear, last year the makeup of the nationalities who were coming irregularly across the border tended to be mainly Haitian and other TPS-affected populations. We therefore ensured that we had outreach efforts directly to those communities in the United States. We clarified a lot of the misinformation they were receiving about our immigration system. We made it clear that coming to Canada irregularly was not a solution to their problems. You have to actually have a—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You and the Prime Minister are the ones who created the problem. This problem never used to exist. In 2016, 2,000 people entered Canada illegally. Now there are 20,000 and that number will continue to climb this year.

The Prime Minister has 4.3 million Twitter followers. Your department, the IRCC, posts warnings on its web site. By the way, that is a good thing because at least you are warning them about something. The Prime Minister could do the same thing through his tweets and offer the same recommendations to all his Twitter followers around the world.

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I disagree with your contention, of course. That's because I think you're mistaking the Prime Minister's statement of a fact that we in Canada offer protection to people who are fleeing war, persecution and terrorism, and that we have a commitment to our international obligations to provide refuge to those who are seeking refuge....

That is not the same thing as saying we agree or concur with people crossing our borders irregularly. The Prime Minister and all the ministers, as well as members of Parliament on our side, have said it very clearly. We do not condone people crossing our borders irregularly. We've taken action to address that. I can point to the many things we have done, including extra funding to make sure that refugee claimants are processed faster so that those who have legitimate claims can stay in the country, and those who do not can be removed faster.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Généreux.

We will now move on to Mr. Vandal.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your presentation.

My first question has to do with retaining francophone immigrants who arrive in official language minority communities such as Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. One of our concerns is that immigrants who arrive in our community end up leaving and going to a major francophone centre where they then integrate into the anglophone community.

Does your department have programs to try to resolve this problem or to ensure that new arrivals stay in the official language minority communities?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's a very important question because it's not just a question of attracting French-speaking immigrants to contribute to the vitality of French-language communities, but also retaining them there so that we don't lose them to secondary migration. According to IRCC's evaluation of the immigration to official-language minority communities initiative, communities outside Quebec gained more French-speaking principal applicants from Quebec than they lost between 2003 and 2014, but that's not enough. As I said on March 2 this year, the ministers responsible for immigration and la Francophonie endorsed a federal-provincial-territorial action plan for increased francophone immigration outside of Quebec. This plan will target areas of collaboration, including accessibility of services in French—this is really important—and the development of inclusive francophone minority communities to retain newcomers. It's about having the facilities and the capacity and the critical mass of newcomers in a particular community so they can be retained through the provision of those services, but also providing the services in French to attract them in the first place.

A lot is being done. There's money to make sure that we make those investments. Horizontal policy coordination within the department through the francophone immigration hub will certainly help in that regard.

● (1555)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay. Thank you.

Often universities, such as the one in my riding, the Université de Saint-Boniface, have a large number of francophone foreign students, but a very similar problem, namely, the trend toward students going back home after graduation. Is the government or your department doing anything to make it easier for students who want to remain in Canada to do so, and are there any specific strategies for minority language communities?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's a very important question. At the end of the day, I think you and I agree that international students make one of the best groups to become future citizens. They're young, they speak English or French, have studied in our institutions and are keen, so why would we not want them to stay? I'm happy to note that we're the first government in Canadian history to go around the world to recruit international students. My predecessor and I, as we have recruited international students to study in Canada, don't just ask them to come here to study. We say, "Come here to study, and if you'd like to stay, we want you to stay." We deliberately send that signal.

We have made it easier for them to stay by various means. First, we've made changes to the express entry system to give more points to international students. You can see that the percentage of international students under the express entry system has grown. Second, we have given more points to French-language speakers under the express entry system. Combined with those two, an international student who demonstrates strong French-language skills has much higher odds of getting picked up by the express entry system now, as opposed to before.

Those changes are having an impact. As I said in my speech, the changes we've made under the express entry system to give more points to francophone applicants has already doubled the number of successful people who have come through that system. That's very encouraging. We need to do more, but we've already done a lot.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

I'll cede the rest of my time to Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you.

Minister, thank you for being here.

I want to begin by commending you on how quickly your French is improving.

Francophone immigration is crucial to the vitality and survival of communities. We have been talking about it for a long time. The fact remains that if 100% or 95% of the people who arrive in a community are anglophones then assimilation is all but inevitable.

I want to share a few important points.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair? Two minutes?

The Chair: No, Mr. Samson, you have 20 seconds remaining. However, you will have the opportunity to speak again later. We can cede the floor to the next speaker and when it is your turn you will have a little more than six minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Will the minister still be here? I don't think that the minister will be here for the whole two hours.

The Chair: Yes, he will be here. It's not a problem.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to learn that the minister will be staying with us for the next two hours.

The Chair: No, that's not what we said. We said that the minister would probably be prepared to stay with us to answer our questions.

Mr. François Choquette: I understood that you were staying for the whole two hours.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I wish I could, but I can't.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

I want to talk about the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Action Plan for Increasing Francophone Immigration Outside of Quebec. In my opinion, the word "community" should be included in the title because the communities are at the heart of the action. According to what the communities are telling me, this plan also lacks deadlines. The plan has targets, but no deadlines to help us determine what is going to happen. There is room for improvement there.

As far as the distribution of funding is concerned, you said that new money was being allocated to immigration. For example, $36.56 million is being allocated to the francophone integration pathway, $4.2 million to collaboration and accounting, and $29.5 million to the Immigration to Official Language Minority Communities Initiative, a sum that was already allocated but deferred.

The communities are still wondering what percentage of that money will go directly to the communities, in the pockets of the community organizations. How much money will end up in the community?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I would like to begin the answer and then pass it on to my officials so they can provide more context. It's important to note that the $40.8 million in the budget allocated new funding to the IRCC precisely for francophone immigration. I spoke about the FPT forum, and also the symposium that brought together governments and community organizations so that we can have a platform and a forum to strengthen francophone immigration into Canada, including through the FPT action plan. Most importantly, David Manicom will provide a further breakdown of some of the monies they're talking about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Manicom (Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): To your question on what proportion of money will go to the communities, I can say that of the $40 million, $36 million will be devoted to the integration programs offered by the services providers in the communities.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Manicom.

Speaking of service providers, Jean Johnson president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne had this to say:

> We want these investments to be direct investments in our community groups so that we can build up our service capacity. We have to stop creating bilingual services. By that I mean anglophone institutions that hire a francophone and then says "We provide a bilingual program".

What would you say to the president of the FCFA?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely, I agree with your concerns. It's something that we've heard loud and clear from the stakeholders, including that organization. Whenever we can ensure the provision of francophone settlement services by francophone settlement organizations, we support that. Whatever we can do as the federal government, not only to provide programming money but also to help the capacity of those organizations to deliver those services, we are more than open to doing.

You heard me speak about the importance of that first step, that first hand-off, where a francophone immigrant and their family are landing at an airport and should be received by a francophone settlement organization, not by an organization that has one francophone employee. We agree with that approach.

The question is, how do we put that policy into effect? What monies are available to redirect to that? What else can we do in our allocation for settlement and integration to ensure that francophone immigrants and newcomers receive francophone-specific settlement services from a francophone settlement organization?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Minister.

I have another question for you.

In 2015, IRCC organized and hosted in British Columbia a national conference on settlement and integration in small centres. According to a report by the then Commissioner of Official Languages, that meeting was held in English only practically. The documentation was in English only.

From March 26 to 28, 2018, that conference was held in Red Deer. Again, everything was in English, Minister. I can prove it. People from francophone associations who attended left frustrated and felt disrespected.

What are you going to do to ensure that this does not happen again? Of course, you are taking measures regarding francophone immigration. However, when you provide services, such as these types of consultations, then you have to show respect for the francophones.

● (1605)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much for the question. I share your frustration with how the francophone participants at that meeting felt about seeing products only in English. I share your frustration, and I understand the premise of your question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Are you going to put measures in place to ensure that this does not happen again?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'll let my official, Corinne, answer that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Corinne Prince (Director General, Settlement and Integration Policy Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

As far as complaints to the Commissioner of Official Languages are concerned, discussions are under way between the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and our department. We are co-operating fully with the OCOL.

As the minister mentioned in his presentation, the department has set up a francophone immigration policy centre. We are working with all employees to ensure that the services are offered in both official languages, especially during conferences, but also within the department.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Arsenault, the floor is yours.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I too would like to commend your tireless efforts to speak French as much as possible. Your French is improving every day and I tip my hat to you.

Roughly a year ago, we received people from Citizenship and Immigration. It was at that time that we learned how hard it is to recruit francophone immigrants. I think that every member of this committee from all parties were extremely troubled to hear that the target for francophone immigration outside Quebec was set at 4.4% and we managed to reach barely 2%. In fact, I'm not even sure if we'll reach 2%. We may not be congratulating ourselves, but we do seem to just accept this fact. You have no idea how much that pains a French-Canadian, an Acadian like me, whose family has been settled in Canada for 12 generations. It is very painful to hear that we have a hard time achieving 2%, let alone the 4.4% target.

According to the testimonies, the machine is difficult to operate. I am talking about funding, immigration, investments in cultural communities. In your presentation, you just provided the answer and I commend you for that. The Department of Finance has invested $40.8 million. Add to that the contribution from your department and that of Minister Joly. These concerted efforts address our concerns. I am sure that this will bear fruit, or at least I hope so.

Page 31 of the famous Official Languages Action Plan 2018-2023 mentions strengthening coordination at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada through the creation of a francophone immigration public policy centre.

What form will this centre take? Are we talking about a sort of sub-department or a parallel department where experts focus only on francophone immigration?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The issue of increasing the numbers is multi-faceted. We have to consider it from the perspective of more money and funding, adequate funding, targeted money for the capacity of francophone settlement organizations, and making sure there's better outreach and marketing. This means not just targeting the usual countries that we've targeted in the past, but looking beyond France and Belgium and targeting other countries as well, making sure that the outreach is more focused. For example, instead of going there and outreaching and marketing Canada to the whole population of a certain country, maybe in addition to that, we should have groups of employers leaving here as a part of a delegation to target specific skilled French-speaking immigrants at job fairs in certain countries so that you can make those connections and they can come here, move their families, and work here.

In terms of the hub, I will let Corrine Prince speak to you in more detail on that.

● (1610)

Ms. Corinne Prince: As the minister mentioned in his speech, we have created a policy focus, a francophone immigration hub, in the settlement and integration sector, particularly in the settlement and integration policy branch, which I manage. The objective is this. Whether we're working with francophone service provider organizations across the country, or our provincial and territorial colleagues, or with employers to attempt to convince them of the benefits of hiring bilingual newcomers, as well as working within our span of programming from promotion or recruitment to selection, integration, retention, and targeted outcomes, the objective is to ensure that we're doing all of that work in a coordinated way, so that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. That is the reason we've put in place this francophone hub in the department.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Ms. Price.

The targets for francophone immigration have not been met and there is a lot of catching up to do.

My question is more specific, Ms. Price. It seems that you were in the position last year. The thought was that having a centre that dealt only with francophone immigration would be much more practical or have a greater impact. The documents talk about strengthening coordination by creating a francophone immigration public policy centre. Is that what we're talking about?

Mr. David Manicom: Since I am the assistant deputy minister of Ms. Price's directorate, I will answer that question.

There are people at the department who are working on that, including our colleagues from Paris and those who deal with policies and activities. To support these efforts, an increased number of employees are working on maintaining a seamless connection. For example, when we meet the communities and employer organizations, some of our employees are strictly in charge of our overseas recruitment, not just at Destination Canada in Paris, but also in Brussels, Rabat, Mexico and many other countries.

The model used by our employees for maintaining the connection between the provinces, territories and French-language communities is also applied at the international level. As far as we're concerned, it is the most effective model.

The Chair: I will now give the floor to our colleague who has been waiting for a long time, Mr. Darrell Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I really enjoyed your presentation. I want to thank your colleagues as well, of course.

Last year, there were many places in Canada where francophone immigration targets were far from being reached, as my colleagues have pointed out. Today, I feel very good because you presented a multilateral approach that I like very much for addressing the problems on the ground.

First there was that meeting between the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for immigration regarding francophone immigration. That is a major step forward that needs to be acknowledged. Then agreements started to be concluded with the provinces. Ontario and New Brunswick signed an agreement. Let's hope that the other provinces also make progress in that regard. I know that Nova Scotia is also very interested. We are talking about problems and solutions that are unique to each province in question. The provinces know that the federal government is truly focusing on increasing francophone immigration. That is a big deal.

The second problem we raised last year was the need to have a centre devoted to francophone immigration. My colleague asked a question about that and I will take it a bit further.

Thirdly, I would like to talk about the immigration reception centres. I know that you are in Toronto, where we have the Centre francophone de Toronto, but do the other provinces offer a similar service? I am thinking about the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, in Nova Scotia, and initiatives in other provinces. What are the other provinces doing to welcome francophone immigrants? Reception is a critical aspect.

Mr. Manicom said that there are people in place in several countries to work on this. Were those same people there two years ago? If so, I would point out that the 4.4% target was not reached. What will be done differently this time to achieve that objective?

● (1615)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will start the answer and then allow Mr. Manicom to complete it.

It is a very important question. I want to begin with the annexes. The two annexes to the agreements we have signed with Ontario and New Brunswick are dedicated to francophone immigration. As part of our immigration agreements, the federal government has committed to work with Ontario and New Brunswick on francophone immigration. That means, for example, sharing profile data with Ontario so that it can pick some of the francophone federal applicants destined to go to Ontario who are not aware of francophone welcoming communities. How can Ontario benefit from that? How can we coordinate and match our targets so that we both achieve them? How can we work together on the marketing?

As I said, it's moving equally not just in terms of general outreach but also in making sure that we have targeted outreach to take advantage of things like the mobility of francophones. We can take Canadian employers who are willing to hire skilled francophone workers and match them in places like Morocco, which has segments of the population who are young and have the high skill levels that are much needed by these employers.

Because you mentioned New Brunswick, the last thing I'll say is that the Atlantic immigration pilot program also presents an opportunity for all four of those provinces to use that program to attract and retain francophone immigrants. For example, New Brunswick is using its Atlantic immigration pilot program number to make sure that it adds to its target to ensure that it shores up the vitality of its francophone community. Nothing stops Nova Scotia from doing the same thing. We have a program initiative in Atlantic Canada called "study and stay", which enables international students in Atlantic Canada to stay and become permanent residents after graduation. It will also help provinces like New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to keep more francophone students in their provinces beyond their studies as permanent residents.

In terms of what is happening now in some of the international offices as opposed to before, Mr. Manicom can—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Just to finish, though, Minister, retaining immigrants is work.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: One piece is *l'accueil* and the other one is integration, but the third one is work. If they don't work, they don't stay.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, minister.

Is there anything you would like to add, deputy minister?

Mr. David Manicom: This is really a non-partisan issue. Previous governments, whether they were Liberal or Conservative, have not had any success in this regard. Now, what has changed is that, rather than choosing between selection tools, retention tools, and tools for coordinating with the provinces, we have decided to combine all three tools into one.

The changes made to the express entry system represent the biggest policy changes for francophones in the history of Canada, and they go hand in hand with a significant increase in the funding available to communities so that an integration path is built by and for francophones in order to retain them.

For the first time, we have partnerships with the provinces that establish real targets. New Brunswick's target under the provincial nominees program is 33%. Ontario's target is 5% because Ontario has a large provincial nominee program.

This is on top of the federal express entry program, where the numbers have doubled. For the first time, success seems within our grasp.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Of course, I want to thank you—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson. I must move on to the next person.

Mr. Bernier, the floor is yours.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here with us today. I have a few questions for you, and I hope you will be able to answer them. If not, I would appreciate if you would provide the answers to the committee in writing later.

Today we learned that over 26,000 illegal migrants crossed the Canadian border last year.

What will processing those 26,000 claims cost the Canadian government?

● (1620)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Did you say 26 million?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: I said 26,000.

[*English*]

It's thousand.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Oh, sorry.

You would have to—

Hon. Maxime Bernier: What was the cost to the federal government of these 26,000 people who crossed the border illegally? Do you have that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There are the costs incurred by the federal government to process them at the border, then there are downstream costs incurred by provinces with respect to social housing and so on.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Do you have any numbers?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I don't know which costs you are referring to.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Both.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I don't have them with me, but I'm sure we can get them for you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: We also learned that approximately 1% of those 26,000 people were sent back to their country of origin, which is about 260 out of 26,000 people.

With regard to those who remained in Canada, you mentioned that approximately 90% of these migrants entered irregularly or illegally, or whatever term you want to use—

The Chair: Mr. Bernier, I would like to remind you that your question must be related to the francophone community outside Quebec.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Please bear with me. I'm getting to that.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: As I was saying, 1% of these people were sent back to their own country. In your opinion, what percentage of people in the same situation will be sent back to their country of origin in the near future? Will it be about the same based on your analyses?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I would be happy to answer that question if I were in charge of Public Safety, but as you know, that's not my portfolio. You would have to pose that question to my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, who is in charge of the CBSA, which is in charge of removals.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: You hired 50 new people to process these claims. I would like to know how long it takes to process a claim. That falls under your jurisdiction. On average, when an illegal migrant crosses the border, in this case a francophone—

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's pretty weak.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: —how long does it take to process the claim?

It could take a number of years if there are 26,000.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, could I say something?

The Chair: Just a moment please.

Mr. Arsenault, you have two seconds.

Mr. René Arseneault: The reason for the objection is obvious. I rise on a point of order.

We have the minister and his team here with us to talk about a specific topic and that is francophone immigration outside Quebec. That is what everyone should be talking about.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: That is what I am talking about. How many francophone migrants—

Mr. René Arseneault: You are pushing it. Excuse me, Mr. Bernier. I have the floor.

The Chair: One moment please, Mr. Arsenault.

Mr. Bernier, could you keep your comments focused on the francophone community outside Quebec, francophones, and francophone immigration?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Yes. I will have a question about that soon.

Mr. René Arseneault: We don't want to hear the other questions.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: In your opinion, how many people, francophones and non-francophones, will cross the border irregularly from now until the end of the year? Of that number, how many of them might be francophone?

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, the member is continuing to flout the Standing Orders.

The Chair: Mr. Bernier, I repeat that any questions for the minister must be related to his presentation. I remind you that we are examining francophone immigration.

Your questions deal with a much broader issue than we are dealing with here this afternoon, so could you please focus your question on francophone communities?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: I would like to ask the minister to answer and then I will ask a question that isn't so broad.

Do you have something to say about that?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I don't know what your question is. You said that we put 50,000 people into something. I don't know what you're referring to.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: No. An extra 50 people were hired to process claims. I would like to know how long it takes to process each one.

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Are you talking about the Immigration and Refugee Board?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Yes.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes, part of budget 2018 made a very important investment of $74 million for faster processing of refugee claims through the Immigration and Refugee Board. That will result in 17,000 more refugee cases being heard every year on top of the existing capacity of the IRB, and faster processing of asylum claims, to less than 12 months for those who are crossing the border irregularly.

The reason for additional funding is so that we can reach those decisions quickly. Those who have a legitimate claim for protection can stay, and the other ones can be removed.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: I believe I still have a minute left.

With regard to our francophone friends, New Brunswick is asking that 33% of immigrants be francophone and Manitoba 7%. What exactly are you going to do to ensure that both provinces get their desired quota of francophone immigrants?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: With New Brunswick, we are aware of that target, and we encourage them with their target. We help them in every way we can, beginning with signing an annex. Within the immigration agreement that we reached with New Brunswick, there is a separate annex for francophone immigration. That's how focused we are on this issue. That means sharing information with them to better help attract francophone immigrants to New Brunswick using the Atlantic immigration pilot so they can not only attract but retain French language speakers in the province.

Expanding the study and stay program beyond Nova Scotia into all of the Atlantic provinces will help New Brunswick, because they'll be able to keep more French-speaking international students in New Brunswick as permanent residents from places like Université de Moncton.

All of those efforts will help build more capacity and services for settlement service organizations to create a more welcoming community.

Then the outreach is really important. New Brunswick has been really good at joining the federal government in terms of outreach for more skilled immigrants from francophone communities to come to Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bernier.

Mr. Boissonnault, you have the floor.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): That's very kind, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being with us.

Thank you for working so closely with the francophone community in Canada and abroad. You are a strong ally of the francophonie and the LGBTQ2 community, another subject that I care a lot about.

[*English*]

I have a quick question. What were you most proud of with the express entry changes that have now doubled the numbers?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I was proud of the fact that we made those changes, because we wanted to drive those numbers higher. We wanted to increase the number of francophone immigrants who were coming through the express entry system. By making a small, but necessary change in June 2017, by giving more points to applicants in the express entry system who demonstrate strong French language skills, we have seen a doubling in the number of successful francophone applicants who have come through the express entry system. That's a huge source of pride to all of us because that's exactly what we wanted to achieve.

If we can double that number in such a short period of time, we're hopeful that this trend will continue to go up, and hopefully triple or quadruple.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: That's excellent.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's my basic answer.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Minister, I think that's great.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, I think that's a victory for the committee given all the hard work that it has done on francophone immigration.

[*English*]

Minister, what else were you happy to work on with the department to get francophone skilled workers and supports in place for francophone immigrants across the country upon arrival? I notice that Pearson International Airport is part of it, but how do we expand that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think you start with Pearson International Airport, because that's where the majority of francophone newcomers are landing in Canada. We have to get it right at Pearson, and we have to move on that very quickly.

In terms of the official languages plan, there is also new money, and that's something I'd really like to communicate to this committee. There's a lot of new money that has also come under the general envelope of settlement and integration. In every successive year we've been in government, we have increased the money available for settlement and integration programs for all newcomers. That, of course, includes francophone newcomers. We will make sure that this money goes to community groups to address your concern, sir, and to make sure that they have not only the right programming and the right capacity, but also the right people delivering the programming.

We'll start with Pearson International Airport and move towards all the other landing zones to make sure that this first hand-off and reception of francophone newcomers is done by a francophone community service organization that delivers francophone-oriented settlement services for newcomers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I have a question about Alberta.

Yesterday, I played the role of Governor General.

● (1630)

[*English*]

It was a great honour.

[*Translation*]

I was the Governor General for the Alberta youth Parliament organized by Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta. I gave royal assent to legislative measures and even read the throne speech the day before.

[*English*]

I think it's one queen speaking with the voice of another, but that's a joke for later.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Minister, what are we doing with individual provinces that are looking to increase their francophone numbers? We're going to 340,000 in 2020. I don't want to see the francophone community in Alberta shrink.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I went to Alberta to conduct ministerial round tables on immigration. I had one in Calgary and another in Edmonton. First of all, on the representation, we made sure there were advocates in the room from the francophone settlement community organizations, and francophone employers and so on, and we spoke about what more we could do.

Well, one of the ideas that were brought forward was to open a second refugee welcoming centre in Canada. There's only one in Winnipeg. As you know, many refugees who come to Canada are coming from French-speaking countries, so part of our approach is to make sure that we also have a strategy for those people.

The second one, which is really important not just for Atlantic Canada but for all of Canada, is international students. I was really disheartened recently when I had a meeting with about 26 leaders of the Canadian Arab community, and only one of them had heard of Mobilité francophone.

They were all employers, so I pushed them hard. I said, look, you have a great program called Mobilité francophone. You come from countries, some of which are French-speaking. Could you please use this program? They were very encouraged, but they hadn't heard enough about it.

I speak often about these programs. I speak about the extra points in express entry. I speak about the Mobilité francophone. I speak about the Atlantic immigration pilot program. I speak about the study and stay program.

[*Translation*]

I am talking about the action plan.

[*English*]

I speak about the extra investments.

[*Translation*]

I am talking about projects undertaken by and for francophones.

[*English*]

I speak about all of those things, but I think you are also ambassadors for this, and you should also speak about these opportunities, because that's what they are. They are opportunities. I can tell you that one of the investments that were made in Alberta was by a company precisely because they identified a bilingual community there.

We have our work to do, and we will continue to work toward those targets. We've done a lot already, but that doesn't necessarily mean that people on the ground are aware of that progress.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Boissonnault.

Even though our time is up, I am going to allow two last questions, one from Ms. Boucher and one from Mr. Choquette.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Minister, thank you for being here with us today. We are always pleased to talk about the francophonie and linguistic minorities here in committee. You no doubt know that our committee is non-partisan, and I am very happy that I am treated with respect, even though I am a Conservative member.

That being said, I will ask my question.

Your action plan states, and I quote:

> From 2015 to 2017, the number of French-speaking immigrants admitted through provincial/territorial immigration programs has more than doubled and represents 38% of all French-speaking immigrants of the economic category.

What percentage of the 38% of French-speaking immigrants of the economic category who came to Canada are now working in one province or another?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much for the question. I would like to begin by putting on the record the fact that I respect all members of Parliament regardless of party status.

Second, we recognize the importance of economic immigration programs as a great tool for Canada to continue to grow our economy, to continue to address labour market challenges, to continue to address skill shortages, and yes, to continue to shore up the vitality of our francophone communities outside of Quebec. That is why we increased our provincial nominee program allocation in our recent immigration plan by 33%, because we want to spread the benefits of immigration all across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Minister—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you Ms. Boucher, but since our time is already up, we agreed that you would ask only one question.

Mr. Choquette, you can ask one last question.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, minister. We hope that the money will indeed get to the communities and that it will be used by and for minority communities, in this case francophone communities.

My question has to do with the family reunification lottery system. The old system was changed into a lottery system. As you know, this move has been highly criticized. However, my question has to do more specifically with francophones.

Could or will such a lottery system penalize francophone families when it comes to reunification? Names are drawn at random from a pool of candidates. Will francophones be part of a separate system or will they just be lumped in with and risk becoming lost within the anglophone majority?

Do you understand my question?

● (1635)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We felt that the parent/grandparent system that we inherited was unfair, so we made two promises. We said we will double the number of the parent and grandparent allocation from 5,000 to 10,000. We've delivered.

The second thing was that the previous system was unfair. If you were willing to spend more money than the next person, or pay a lot of money to an agent, or if you lived closer to the processing centre, you would have better odds than the next person. That wasn't a fair system, so we introduced a fair system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: What about francophones?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: In terms of the francophone applicants, there's no discrimination against francophone applicants under the parent/grandparent program. All applicants are treated the same.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: So they will be lumped in with the majority for the lottery.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: In the system they're treated like every other applicant, and they have the same opportunity as any other applicant to sponsor their parent or grandparent.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Minister, before we wrap up, I too would like to ask you a question.

We learned here in this committee that the French tests that people who want to come to Canada have to take were written and designed in Paris. We know that France is different from Canada. Why not solicit bids in Canada to see if someone here could write a Canadian French test?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You actually read my mind.

Thank you for reminding me of that point. There is an ongoing process; we're having a discussion with a second service provider in addition to the one that exists right now, to provide those services, to make them more accessible, and to introduce competition into the field so that prices can come down for our French language speakers who take the test.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's a Canadian company.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Okay.

Minister, thank you very much for being here with us today. I speak for all my colleagues when I say that you have shed a lot of light on our concerns.

We'll suspend for a few minutes and then come back to talk to the people from your department, who will remain with us.

● (1635)

(Pause)

● (1640)

The Chair: For the second hour of the meeting, we'll be speaking with the departmental representatives.

We'll move immediately into questions and comments.

We'll start with Sylvie Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Hello and welcome.

I would like to ask two very simple questions. They have already been asked but, for one reason or another, we did not have time to hear the answers.

My first question is this. Of the 38% of French-speaking immigrants of the economic category who arrived in Canada between 2015 and 2017 under provincial and territorial immigration programs, what percentage are now working in French in provinces where there are francophone minorities?

My second question has to do with the test designed in Paris. Our committee has learned that the French test costs twice as much as the English test. That does not make any sense to us. What we want to know is why Canada, regardless of what party was in power, never thought to design the test here in Canada. Since we have our own Canadian expressions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand. Someone in my riding office had me take the test a few years ago, and I think I would have been deported because I did not do well at all.

These two questions are very important to me. I would like to know what percentage of the 38% of French-speaking immigrants of the economic category who arrived between 2015 and 2017 are now working in French in the provinces, and why the French test was not written in Canada.

Anyone can answer.

● (1645)

Mr. David Manicom: Thank you for your questions, Ms. Boucher.

We have pretty accurate data on the number of people who are working and the number of people who are working in the province where they first arrived. We have access to that information because our databases are linked to the tax system. We can send you those numbers.

However, we do not have any detailed information about the number of people working in French. We are not the kind of society that collects that type of information. People are not required to report to the government whether they work in English or French. We therefore cannot tell you exactly how many people work in French or what percentage of their day is spent working in French.

We do have data on the number of newcomers who are working and the number of newcomers who are working in the province where they first arrived.

With regard to provincial candidates, I can say that most of them are working and that the vast majority of immigrants still live in the province where they first arrived.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So what you are saying is that there is no way of knowing what percentage of the 38% of French-speaking immigrants of the economic class are working in French because that information is not available.

Did I understand correctly?

Mr. David Manicom: That data does not exist.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

Mr. David Manicom: I imagine that it would be difficult for a society like Canada to collect that type of information.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

I would like to come back to the test designed in Paris. More and more people are asking that this test be written in Canada. From what the minister said, there is a bidding process under way in that regard.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

The tests that we are using are not used only for immigration. These tests are designed by large international corporations that design language tests for various purposes, for example, university admissions.

We have been looking for a Canadian company to design these tests for a long time. We have language tests in Canada, but we need a language test for this specific purpose that can be administered anywhere in the world. In the past, no company, except the Paris chamber of commerce, was prepared to offer that service throughout the world in order to meet our needs.

The department is finalizing negotiations with a Canadian company to do that work. I was told that the contract would take effect sometime between now and the fall and that the necessary changes will be made to our electronic system.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Will your department ensure that the French test costs the same as the English test and that it will not cost more to take the test in French?

Mr. David Manicom: There is every reason to believe that it will cost about the same to take the test in French or English in Canada. Internationally, it is very complex because the price varies from one country to another. Naturally, there is a bigger demand worldwide for English tests.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

Mr. David Manicom: That being said, there will be a significant improvement. The test will be designed in Canada.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation and the information you provided.

I would first like to commend you, and it isn't every day that I congratulate someone for the work they do for minorities. At least you paid attention to the situation last year. As you know, members of this committee are very frustrated with the unacceptable lack of success we have been seeing over the years. Major changes were needed. We see that such changes are being made and that is good.

I want to come back to my friend Mr. Choquette's question about the lottery. I will tell you a quick story and then I will share with you the solution that I would like you to incorporate into your strategy.

Thirty years ago, when I began teaching, I was teaching in an anglophone community. Four of my students were Acadians who did not know how to speak French. Since they were learning French with me, I encouraged them to apply for a scholarship to take French classes over the summer. All four submitted an application, but none of them were chosen. Since Nova Scotia's population is 96% anglophone and only 4% francophone, the probability of an anglophone being chosen was huge. These assimilated francophones did not receive a scholarship to learn French, but anglophones were given the resources to do so. We therefore established two programs.

I am not saying that you should do the same. However, we have a francophone immigration target of 4.4%. I would suggest that, once 80% of the names are drawn at random, you stop the process and determine how many francophones have been chosen at that point. If it is 2.4%, then there is still 2% missing. In that case, the next names that are drawn could be drawn only from the pool of francophones in order to fill that missing 2% or until a minimum of 4.4% is reached. Then the process could resume as usual and the remaining 8,% 10% or 12% of names could be drawn at random. That way, you would still be holding a lottery but it would be in keeping with the francophone immigration target of 4.4%. That is my suggestion, and I hope it will be implemented as of tomorrow morning.

There is another important issue that I talked about with the minister earlier today and over the past few days. The government has invested funds in order to bring francophone immigrants to minority communities. It is done for and by one group in the province. It varies from one province to another. Some provinces are doing better than others. Things are going fairly well in Nova Scotia, even though the success rate is not the greatest. Investments are being made in welcoming immigrants and helping them to integrate, but funding for employment is not getting to the right organizations. At least that is what is happening in Nova Scotia. I can't speak for the other provinces. I am talking here about the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, or CDENE, in my province and the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, or RDEE, in francophone communities in other provinces. Since these organizations specialize in employability, they are the ones that should be receiving the funding for employment. I agree with the choice of organizations for other aspects of integration, but these are the organizations that should be given funding to help immigrants find jobs. They have asked for money to create such a position, but they have not yet managed to secure it. We would like them to be given funding for that.

My last question has to do with annex agreements, which I love. You have already met with departmental representatives from across Canada. Annex agreements were developed for New Brunswick and Ontario. Do you intend to talk to the ministers in the other provinces to develop annex agreements?

Thank you.

● (1650)

Mr. David Manicom: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

I heard your recommendations, but I am not sure whether you had questions about the first two issues you mentioned.

Mr. Darrell Samson: My question is simple. Do you agree with me? If so, the answer is simple.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Manicom: My answer to the first question is no, but my answers to the second and third questions are both yes.

With regard to the third question about whether we communicate regularly with the representatives from the other provinces and encourage them to follow the examples of Ontario and New Brunswick, the answer is yes, absolutely. That is what Joël Denis, who is here with us today, does on a daily basis.

With regard to your second question, the money that we are investing in the integration programs offered by and for francophones will really be directed toward partnerships. The idea is that the money will be used to broaden the scope of those programs in co-operation with the type of organizations—

● (1655)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Don't forget that in Nova Scotia, it's the CDENE, while in all the other provinces, it's the RDEE.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: There is no RDEE in my province of Nova Scotia. It's the CDENE. Please discuss this matter with those people.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: With regard to my first question about the lottery, you answered no, but could you tell us why?

Mr. David Manicom: I am not responsible for developing the Government of Canada policy on that. I can only say that the current family reunification policy is a blind formula. It does not grant preference to any country, race, or linguistic profile. The system provides an equal opportunity for every person who wants to sponsor his or her spouse, partner, children, or parents.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That system is not working. We need to implement a system that would guarantee that we meet the target of 4.4%.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to talk about targets. Earlier, I talked about the criticisms that the communities have made of this infamous plan. The plan sets out deadlines for meeting the targets, but it does not set out any deadlines for establishing measures to reach those targets. Do you intend to establish such deadlines?

Mr. David Manicom: I will give you my answer and then I will give the floor to Mr. Denis.

The government's overall plan establishes a target of 4.4% and a deadline by which that must be achieved. Naturally, the federal government is not responsible for what the provinces do. It is a co-ordinated effort.

Mr. Denis can give you a more detailed answer.

Mr. Joël Denis (Director, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): As Mr. Manicom mentioned, every province and territory must ensure that it meets its own targets. The federal government provides support, regardless of the actions of the provinces and territories, including those with targets.

With regard to implementing the plan, one of the 10 measures set out in the three strategies has to do with establishing performance indicators. It is more important to assess progress over time, rather than the presence or absence of measures. That will be done through ministers meetings because these are ministerial agreements.

Mr. François Choquette: So you have deadlines for developing these indicators.

Mr. Joël Denis: At every ministers' meeting, francophone immigration is a priority that is reported through—

Mr. François Choquette: Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Denis, but time is short.

Community organizations are not aware of these deadlines. Could you pass them on to the committee?

Mr. Joël Denis: We can confirm our expectations, as we did at the symposium.

Mr. François Choquette: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Denis.

You mentioned a target of 4.4% for 2018. The year isn't over yet. Are the latest figures we have from 2017?

Mr. Joël Denis: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: What is the national percentage of francophone immigration outside of Quebec that has been achieved?

Mr. David Manicom: I have the figures in front of me. It's about 2%.

Mr. François Choquette: So we're a long way from 4.4%. We're not going to make it. We are not going to reach the 4.4% target in 2018.

Mr. David Manicom: No, not in 2018.

Mr. François Choquette: All right.

Which provinces need the most support? There are probably some provinces that are having more "success" than others. Are there any provinces that need more support? Do you do an evaluation of the support you give the provinces?

Mr. David Manicom: We support community organizations through federal settlement funding. The Canadian immigrant integration program is really community-based. There are about 500 settlement service providers, about 50 of which are francophone.

We work more closely with the provinces that have set specific targets. Unfortunately, not all provinces have set a provincial target for francophone immigration yet. The federal government can't make them set one, but it encourages them to do so. We're currently working more closely with New Brunswick and Ontario because they have concrete targets to meet.

● (1700)

Mr. François Choquette: Ontario and New Brunswick, the provinces that have signed annexes, are to be commended.

Are you hoping to sign annexes with other provinces? Are there any problems with the provincial governments? Why haven't the other provinces signed annexes yet?

Mr. Joël Denis: I can confirm that promoting francophone immigration is a priority for all territories and provinces. It's included in the agreements signed by the ministers.

However, as Mr. Manicom mentioned, each province and territory has its own priorities and capabilities. The federal government is ready to support them through our programs so they can make their own decisions on how to promote their economic agendas.

We offer all provinces the option of signing agreements on francophone immigration, but that's not the only partnership mechanism. That is why we have the action plan.

Mr. François Choquette: The minister told us earlier that he's been meeting with francophone minority communities across the country.

Just as a good faith gesture, without having to resort to access to information, could we get a list of the people and communities he has met with over the past year?

Mr. David Manicom: I think we could get you that information.

Mr. François Choquette: Great, thank you.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, your time is up.

Mr. François Choquette: All right.

Thank you for your answers.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Choquette.

Now we will move on to Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here. I commend your department for turning the corner on francophone immigration, but we just need to ask you some questions to address certain shortcomings.

Not to sound defeatist, but it would be an understatement to say that francophone immigration outside of Quebec is "failing", if I can use Darrell Samson's phrase from earlier. It is a total failure across the board, under both this government and the previous government, but we are setting things straight. I am telling you this, Mr. Manicom, because we need to not only meet the objective, but exceed it too. Wishful thinking, I know, but we need to exceed this objective in order to eliminate the gap that has persisted for generations.

Do you agree with what I just said?

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Is the department aware of it?

Mr. David Manicom: But—

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm looking for a simple yes or no answer, because I only have six minutes.

Is this department aware of the francophone immigration gap that has persisted for years?

Mr. David Manicom: The department is aware. In fact, I think the minister himself has often said he wants to exceed expectations.

Mr. René Arseneault: I know, but I want bureaucrats to be made aware of it. I'm sure the minister is already aware. It's his staff who need to grasp the urgency.

Mr. David Manicom: I can't speak for the other 6,000 people working in the department.

Mr. René Arseneault: I understand, but I'm passing on the message indirectly.

I also wanted to talk about the famous lottery we mentioned. I know you said there would be no discrimination based on country of origin, sex, religion, or race. I understand that. However, Canada was built on the theory of two founding peoples, a theory we enshrined in black and white in the Charter and the Official Languages Act.

On that basis alone, wouldn't you agree that the lottery needs to respect the minimum target of 4.4% for francophone immigration? We are talking about the language of one of the founding peoples, and one of our official languages.

Do you agree with that argument?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I know I do.

Mr. David Manicom: The current government has created selection tools to give francophones an advantage, and that is definitely a first. At this time, we don't have a policy on favouring francophones for family reunification. If we take francophone immigration targets into account when processing applications from Canadians hoping to sponsor their spouse or grandchildren, we end up favouring one group over another. But if we manage to attract francophone economic immigrants at a rate of 4.4% or more, these people will later naturally tend to sponsor their spouses, parents, or grandparents.

As far as I know, no government to date has studied the possibility of having a process where one Canadian get to sponsor their spouse and another doesn't.

● (1705)

Mr. René Arseneault: I see. No government has thought of it, but I think we will have to start thinking about it now. That's my opinion, and I think it's one the committee shares.

Would it be possible to contemplate a process that is open, transparent, and non-discriminatory? We need to at least make sure the selection process fully respects Canada's two official languages and that this lottery meets the 4.4% target for francophone immigrants settling outside of Quebec. Is that possible?

Mr. David Manicom: Is it possible? I can't answer that question on behalf of the government.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

Mr. David Manicom: Spouses are by far the largest category in the family class.

Mr. René Arseneault: As an administrator, can you push that argument?

Mr. David Manicom: Sorry?

Mr. René Arseneault: Can you support that argument?

Mr. David Manicom: Me personally? No.

Mr. René Arseneault: All right.

Mr. David Manicom: I'll give you my personal opinion about family reunification. As far as I know—and I've been working in this department for a long time—no government has ever considered the possibility of limiting reunification of immediate family members by using criteria other than the family relationship.

Mr. René Arseneault: Regarding the hub that's going to be created, I gather that it will be a parallel hub that will have staff, who I assume will be francophone, though I don't know for sure, whose job is specifically to maximize francophone immigration.

I'd like to make you a suggestion. If possible, it would be advisable and certainly efficient to ensure that the people chosen to staff this hub, either from within the department or from outside, come from francophone communities outside Quebec. They'll stand up for you every time, you'll see. It's just a suggestion, and you don't have to respond to it, but there's no doubt that members of francophone communities outside Quebec who are working to attract and retain francophone immigrants in their provinces are loyal champions. I just hope you'll bear that in mind.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Vandal, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much.

I have a few questions.

About six weeks ago, the action plan for official languages 2018-23 was unveiled. I think it had a five-year budget of about $29.5 million.

On March 2, the federal/provincial/territorial action plan for increasing francophone immigration outside of Quebec was unveiled.

Do these two action plans have the same objectives?

Could you tell me how they complement each other, or how it's going to work?

Mr. David Manicom: I would ask Ms. Prince to answer that question, because she's been involved in this file directly for a long time.

However, I can tell you that the objectives remain the same. There is, of course, an increase or concentration of strategies with regard to francophone immigration funding in order to emphasize a pathway to integration that is built by and for francophones.

In the past, we used to devote almost all of our efforts to promotion and recruitment, but over the years we came to realize that we weren't having much success, to put it mildly. Promotion and recruitment efforts absolutely need to continue. While the results of the express entry program are promising, we need to keep adding new candidates to this pool.

Once people arrive in Canada, we want them to stay in our communities, not move to Montreal two years later. Over the next few years, our efforts and funding will be focused on creating a pathway built by and for francophones.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Are both plans focused on retention? I'm referring to the action plan for official languages 2018-23 and the federal/provincial/territorial action plan for increasing francophone immigration outside of Quebec.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes, the two plans go hand in hand. Naturally, in the case of the federal/provincial/territorial coordination plan, the provinces and territories' main goal is to retain immigrants. So in that sense, the two plans go very well together, in my opinion.

● (1710)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Ms. Prince, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Corinne Prince: Yes, thank you.

The federal/provincial/territorial action plan 2018-23 includes a component for providing settlement services to French-speaking immigrants. As part of the action plan for official languages 2018-23, which was recently launched by Minister Joly, our department will also be receiving funds for providing francophone settlement services.

So both plans contain targets, especially for francophone settlement. But in the action plan for official languages, the federal plan for the next five years, there are three components for which our department is going to receive funding. The first is building the capacity of the francophone settlement sector. The second is creating welcoming communities in order to address the retention objective that you mentioned earlier. The third is providing adapted language training.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I also know there was an Atlantic growth strategy that included immigration measures, probably for retaining immigrants.

Did that experience yield any best practices that we could apply to official language minority communities?

Mr. David Manicom: It's much too soon to evaluate the Atlantic immigration pilot. It only just started, and we don't have enough retention data to be able to say whether it's working.

However, it is a very important experiment. The idea behind this pilot is to increase retention by putting a settlement plan in place in coordination with the employer and the community before the immigrant even arrives. It's also a very important concept for francophone communities.

Most of our integration and settlement programs aren't about retention at all. There are no concerns about retaining immigrants in Toronto or Vancouver. Implementing retention-focused programs means working with communities and employers before the immigrants arrive. That's the concept behind the Atlantic immigration pilot. This concept will certainly be part of our efforts to develop an integration pathway built by and for francophones.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Alleslev, you can use the rest of Mr. Vandal's speaking time to ask two brief questions.

[*English*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): I have two quick questions. First, is the stay and study program—or study and stay program—for high school students as well? There are high school students in my riding who are studying in French immersion, and I wondered if it applies to them. Second, would you consider the fact that the French test is considerably more expensive than the English test as somewhat discriminatory and unfair—in a process where we're looking to make it more fair?

Mr. David Manicom: With regard to study and stay program in the Atlantic provinces, I don't think it applies to high school students, but I will check to be sure. These are transition programs being developed by the provinces, so the one may not be identical to the other, so I would have to check that. It's not my area of responsibility.

With regard to the cost of French-language tests, no one in the department is happy that the English tests were less expensive in the past. The challenge is very big. The number of principal applicants who take these tests—which are only required in our economic programs—are several thousand per year. To provide those at hundreds of locations in Canada and globally—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Should they not be subsidized by the government to ensure that the access is the same regardless of language?

Mr. David Manicom: We've looked at all such models. If you want them to be provided in a lot of places at reasonable cost, you need to work with an organization that does such language testing for multiple purposes, so you can make it economically viable. The government could set up language tests globally and run them ourselves with civil servants, but that would be extraordinarily expensive and we don't feel that we could begin to match the coverage of organizations like the *Chambre des commerce de Paris* who work in the Lycée system globally and in the French cultural systems globally. We are delighted now to be working with a Canadian organization that will introduce more competition into this field.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Alleslev.

Over to you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

My colleagues said earlier that we failed to implement a working framework in the past. Personally, I think that's going a little far.

We know that about $70 million is going to be added, of which $40 million is earmarked for your services.

In your opinion, what is the starting point of this five-year plan? The $36.56 million dedicated to the francophone integration pathway is going to be invested over five years. What are the initial criteria that will allow us to determine, five years from now, whether we have succeeded and met our goal? What is the objective we hope to reach in five years, compared with the initial objective? What are the initial benchmarks?

I would also like to you to explain to me the specific objectives this money is meant to achieve. For example, it talks about building the capacity of francophone organizations in the settlement sector. Does that mean more staff, people on the ground, employees in Ottawa? What kind of reporting is involved? How will we, as a committee—hopefully we'll all still be here in five years—analyze what happened in the five preceding years? We can look back 20 years, but we need to trace a line down to today. In five years, will we be able to say what happened and what did or didn't work?

Mr. David Manicom: That's a big question, and a complex one.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes, it's a very big question.

Mr. David Manicom: Right now, we get $29 million for the francophone immigration project. That budget is going to be increased by about a third, so we're going to get another $5 million this fiscal year, another $5 million next year, and another $10 million each year after that. So our budget is increasing from about $30 million to $40 million a year.

The bulk of that money, meaning $36 million of the $40 million over five years, will go towards communities with service providers that offer language training, connections with employers, bridging programs to support newly arrived immigrants until they start a job, integration assistance for communities, or any other comparable local services.

How can our success be measured? First and foremost, we will have made a lot of progress towards the target of 4.4%. Next, we will be able to say that we've been successful if the vast majority of these people stay in official language minority communities, meaning francophone communities outside of Quebec.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I completely understand your answer.

Do you have some kind of dashboard so the government and the Standing Committee on Official Languages can see percentages that would show what the starting point is and what the end point is? Right now, we're at about 2.5%, and we want to get to 4.4%. The target used to be 5%, if I'm not mistaken. It's been lowered to 4.4%, so it keeps falling.

Am I wrong in saying that?

Mr. David Manicom: Yes. I don't think there's ever been a 5% target.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Why am I thinking of 5% then?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That might be Ontario's target.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Maybe Ontario. All right.

That being said, I would like to see a dashboard that provides annual data we can use to track progress. Are you preparing anything like that?

Mr. David Manicom: We are certainly going to develop a way to monitor our progress towards the achievement of our targets, as well as to track the results of our immigrant integration and retention programs in detail. I don't have a dashboard to give you today, but that's something we're in the process of putting together.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I was not necessarily looking for a table today, but you know what I mean.

What I mean is that you must require a minimum of accountability from your subcontractors. You have 500 of them across Canada. These people provide services, and of course we know how it works: some of these suppliers got a grade of 10 on the evaluation of their services, while others got just a 2. Of course, they are not all equal: some are more effective, and some are less effective. You have to be able to evaluate the performance of all your suppliers.

On another topic, will some of the money stay here, in Ottawa? My fear, I admit, is that a considerable share of the new funding will stay in Ottawa and not go to the communities. We see that often.

Of the new funding that you will be receiving over the next five years, is there a set percentage that will remain in Ottawa, to provide supervision, for instance? Do you need extra staff to supervise the use of the additional funding that you will receive?

● (1720)

Mr. David Manicom: Yes, as I said, about 90% of the funding will go to the communities. Some money will stay in Ottawa, but for good reasons, I think, such as the one you mentioned. We also want to have full-time staff to coordinate the programs with the provinces and evaluate them, record the results, conduct research, organize job fairs abroad, and coordinate all those activities. Yes, there will be extra staff in Ottawa, but the vast majority of this funding will go directly into grants and contributions, which we use to meet our objectives through partner organizations in our communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

We will now move on to Ms. Linda Lapointe for four minutes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to say something quickly in closing.

The Chair: You may have a few seconds, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like the committee to officially ask the department to report back to us by providing a detailed dashboard that shows how the money will be invested over the next five years.

The Chair: Is that a problem, Mr. Manicom?

Mr. David Manicom: I do not know exactly what you are looking for and what your expectations are, Mr. Généreux, so it is a difficult for me to answer that question.

The Chair: Can you explain, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It is actually directly related to the document that Mr. Choquette is showing us right now. It is absolutely essential that you report on the results obtained on all the objectives. Let me reiterate that you have an initial objective. In order to evaluate in five years what might be considered success, you will have to go from point *a* to point *b*.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So, for us to know what is happening between those two points, over the next five years, you would have to report to the committee every year.

The Chair: A schedule.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: This report would include the evaluation criteria for the objectives that you have set, not us.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes, sir, absolutely. We have a performance framework for this program and we will report to the committee on that.

The Chair: If possible, we would like you to provide your performance framework to our clerk so the committee members can review it.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes, I will have to consider that.

The Chair: What do you mean by that?

Mr. David Manicom: I did not really understand your question.

The Chair: You just said that you have an internal performance framework. If your timeline is five years, we would like to review the progress being made over those five years.

Could you provide the performance framework to the committee clerk?

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lapointe is up next.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being with us today.

I arrived after the minister left, but I am very interested in what you are saying. The target is 4.4%, but it is not being met. A colleague asked earlier which provinces meet it and which ones do not. I don't think you clearly stated which provinces are doing a better job of meeting their target than others. You said the federal government cannot require the provinces to set targets. It cannot require that, but it can encourage them to set targets through the agreements.

With regard to immigration and the economic agenda, some practices are more effective than others. How could you let the provinces know that some of them have adopted practices that produce better results?

Please tell us about the best practices and how they could be applied by the other provinces.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes, of course. Sharing best practices is officially part of the shared plan with the provinces and territories.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I said initially that some provinces are better able to meet their target than others. Which provinces are they?

● (1725)

Mr. David Manicom: The provincial targets are very recent.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Very recent? Do you mean one year, two years or three years?

Mr. David Manicom: Ontario's target has been known for a year, I believe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Has Ontario been able to increase its francophone immigration target?

Mr. David Manicom: It should be noted that the provincial targets are not total immigration targets. Their target is set through their own provincial nominee programs, which is in fact the part they control.

Ontario's objective is for francophones to make up 5% of provincial nominees. I do not think that objective has been achieved to date.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You said earlier that the 4.4% target would not be achieved in 2018 and that the level would once again be about 2%.

On the other hand, if the best practices result in higher levels, is there not some way they could be shared with the others?

Mr. David Manicom: Absolutely.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: What are those best practices? I would like you to tell us.

Mr. David Manicom: You want to know what the provinces' best practices are, but as I just said, the provincial targets are very recent so we cannot tell yet whether a province has been successful.

That said, it is very promising that the federal program has changed our express entry program to give extra points to international students who speak French. We have noted recently that the percentage of francophones invited to apply has doubled. That is extremely promising.

On the whole, the provinces still work very closely with their communities, especially New Brunswick, as you can imagine. The goal is to connect employers who can offer jobs with international recruitment efforts. We work very closely with the provinces and our overseas missions to help them.

Sharing best practices, now and in the future, is officially part of the federal-provincial-territorial action plan.

Ms. Corinne Prince: Let me give you some examples of best practices used by certain provinces. Last year, Ontario created Destination Ontario, and the Atlantic provinces created Destination Acadie. These programs are similar to Destination Canada. These initiatives have been very helpful. These are just a few of the best practices that the provinces intend to use.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. François Choquette: I do not have much time left. In any case, we have covered a lot, I think, but I would like to go back to what Mr. Généreux just said.

As I have said from the outset, I am interested in the federal-provincial action plan to increase francophone immigration outside Quebec as a way of supporting official language minority communities. We asked for this the first time the minister appeared, and we have now obtained it. It is a step in the right direction. It is a first draft, however, and we can see that there is still a lot of work to be done.

You talked about the development of indicators, Mr. Denis. We would also like to know what those indicators are and what your objectives will be for next year and for 2020. This will allow us to follow the progress in you work.

There is just one think that concerns me, and it pertains to the creation of this public policy hub for francophone immigration. As Mr. Arseneault also pointed out, we would have liked to see more than a hub. We would have liked a whole section of the department entirely devoted to francophone immigration to official language minority communities. I think the hub answers just part of that request.

Just consider that the level of francophone immigration will be about 2% next year, while a minimum of 4.4% is needed to maintain our demographic weight. Otherwise, the demographic weight of francophones will continue to decline, which will unfortunately weaken those communities.

As you can see, Mr. Chair, I do not really have a question.

● (1730)

The Chair: I understand that those are concluding remarks.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, those are the general comments I wanted to make.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Manicom, Mr. Denis, Ms. Prince and Ms. Flowers Code, thank you very much for your excellent presentations.

Before we wrap up, I would like to remind the members of the committee that a report on early childhood will be presented to the House at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow. Then at 1:15 p.m., there will be a press conference in the foyer of the House of Commons.

On Wednesday, we will begin reviewing a draft report on the media.

The committee is adjourned.

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